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C O N F I D E N T I A L SINGAPORE 002456

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [SN](#)

SUBJECT: SINGAPORE ELECTS, UM, SELECTS ITS PRESIDENT

Classified By: EP Counselor Laurent Charbonnet, Reasons 1.4(b)(d)

1. (U) Singapore's Presidential Elections Committee (PEC) announced August 13 that it had certified incumbent President S.R. Nathan, alone among four applicants, as eligible to contest this year's presidential election. Only Nathan, 81, will participate in the Nomination Day ceremony August 17, whereupon he will receive a second six-year term, which will begin with inauguration on September 1. The government has cancelled the presidential election slated for August 27. This is the second time that Nathan has been selected without having to face an opponent. Three government-appointed senior civil servants comprise the PEC.

Strict Criteria for Office

2. (U) Singapore's constitution requires that presidential candidates meet a number of very specific requirements - for example, they must have had experience at the cabinet level in government, served as chairman or CEO of a statutory board, or been chairman or CEO of a firm with paid-up capital of S\$100 million. They also can not be members of a political party. The position is largely ceremonial, though the president has limited oversight authority over government spending, as a check against profligate spending by an "irresponsible" (i.e., non-Peoples Action Party) government.

A Challenger?

3. (U) Of the disallowed candidacies, the most interesting was that of Andrew Kuan, a member of the ruling PAP who announced his plans to resign from the party and run for president in an August 5 interview with the Straits Times. Kuan almost looked like he might qualify: he had served as CFO of Jurong Town Corporation (JTC), an important statutory institution, for three years. While not exactly meeting the constitutional criteria, the press speculated that it might be good enough.

4. (U) Kuan quickly ran into a PAP buzz-saw, however. Following several days of unflattering press stories regarding his performance at previous jobs, assertions by the GOS-controlled JTC that they had asked him to resign or face being fired for unsatisfactory performance finally seemed to do him in. The PEC announced that his application to run had been denied because his work experience as group financial officer for JTC did not match the constitutionally mandated criteria. Less controversially, the PEC also denied the candidacies of Ooi Boon Ewe (a reportedly formerly bankrupted businessman whose business license had expired) and Ramachandran Govindasamy Naidu (who had retired in 1987 from military service as a senior storekeeper).

5. (C) Comment: The risk-averse GOS once again demonstrated it prefers superficial unanimity to the "embarrassment" of the predictably 25-30 percent protest vote. The field of possible presidential candidates is already extremely narrow, limited to the political and business elite, and the PAP senior leadership had already backed the avuncular Nathan for a second term when Kuan launched his quixotic candidacy. While the press' background-checking and dirt-digging would be par for the course in any normal democracy, Singaporeans were aware of the ironies of a government-controlled press reporting "revelations" from government-controlled institutions regarding the qualifications of someone brave enough to throw his hat in the ring. End Comment.

LAVIN